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AUTHOR Rhodes, Frank H. T.
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ABSTRACT

Issues concerning participation by minority groups in higher education in the United States are considered, along with some criticisms of higher education concerning: the substance and style of undergraduate education; efficiency and cost of college; a confusion of aims, missions, and goals among colleges and universities; and access, choice, and admissions issues. Enrollment trends for minorities since World War II are briefly traced, and implications of declining minority participation are noted. Possible responses to declining minority enrollments are recommended: increasing efforts in recruiting, improving retention, providing adequate support services, facilitating employment and graduate and professional study, and fostering wider partnerships with schools. Suggestions for universities and schools include better teacher training programs in the colleges and schools and better opportunities for teacher recognition, career development, and professional satisfaction in the schools. Targets by which to reduce the high school dropout rate nationwide and programs to achieve it are also proposed, along with establishing a meaningful competency level of literacy for school graduates. (SW)

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Frank H.T. Rhodes

A NEGLECTED CHALLENGE:

Minority Participation in Higher Education

Academy for Educational Development

AED

Occasional Paper Number Seventeen

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AED ACADEMY FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This speech was presented in May 1987 on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Board of Directors of the Academy for Educational Development. Dr. Alvin C. Eurich founded the Academy in 1961 and served as its president for 26 years. He died several weeks after this occasion. The Academy dedicates this publication to his memory.

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A NEGLECTED CHALLENGE:

Minority Participation in Higher Education

A Neglected Challenge

Frank H.T. Rhodes
President, Cornell University

It is a great pleasure to be speaking before this distinguished group. In its 26 years, the Academy for Educational Development has established an impressive record of service. From Nepal to Pittsburgh, from endowment management to high school retention, in 300 projects around the world, AED has continued to play a leadership role during the past year. All of you here tonight are connected in one way or another with the solid achievements that those prjects represent. For behind the particular statistics—impressive as they are—there are also societies that have been improved, communities that have been enriched, and lives that have been transformed.

I want particularly to salute Al Eurich—founder, leader, and exemplar of the Academy—for the dedicated leadership he continues to give to us all. Al, we salute you, thank you, honor you, for all that you have done for us and for all that you are. You personify, in your own dedication and high professional standards, all that we cherish in higher education.

I want to talk with you tonight about the challenges we face together as we look at higher education for the remainder of this century. It scarcely seems possible that it is a mere six months ago that Harvard celebrated its 350th anniversary. Many of you here tonight were present at the festivities which marked that memorable occasion. There were learned discussions, exhibits, and symposia. There were concerts and readings of all kinds. There were balloons across the Charles River and fireworks on its

banks. Prince Charles spoke to a great gathering in Harvard Yard, and Derek Bok appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine*.

There was, in all this, a proper sense of national celebration and achievement. But with all the academic hyperbole and the celebratory hoopla, there were also critical comments of substantial concern, directed not just at Harvard, but at higher education in general. These concerns, voiced by individuals of such different persuasions as U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett and Dr. Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, have involved four specific criticisms of higher education.

First, the substance and style of undergraduate education are seen by some critics to be inadequate. I spoke at length about this at the Harvard-Carnegie symposium, and I will not repeat my comments here tonight. Suffice it to say that I believe we cannot go home again to the snug homogeneity of the colonial college. The cultural and racial diversity of our nation makes that impossible, and no amount of nostalgia for a bygone age will recover the innocence we once knew.

Nor can we reform undergraduate education and ignore the rest of the educational enterprise. What seems to me essential is that progress must be made through, rather than instead of, students' career goals. I am not advocating vocational training, which is narrow and restrictive and which develops skills in preparation for routine tasks, sometimes admittedly very complex and technical. Such vocational training is impervious to social context and oblivious to moral choice; it raises no questions of larger significance. Rather, I would like to see our undergraduate programs provide professional education in a large and expansive sense, bringing to bear the spirit of the liberal arts, setting skills as a means to larger ends, concerned not with 'the job,' but with life itself and with the social goals a profession promotes and the

ethical standards it demands.

For the expansive professional education I have in mind, we need, not a new curriculum, but a new spirit of liberal learning and the skills to achieve it. This spirit involves not so much the material that we 'cover,' but the pattern of learning that we encourage; not so much the content, but the attitude we bring to learning and to life. Reading and writing skills, the personal discipline to use them, some concept of times and cultures other than our own, some sense of intellectual context, some exposure to non-bookish experiences, and some orderly, disciplined learning in a selected subject are essential to this kind of undergraduate education.

But in the end, it is not courses, but people who transform the culture of the college and redeem individual lives. Discovery and meaning ultimately have to be personal, coming as much from individual example as from linkages between subjects and courses. If we can provide that kind of challenging, enlarging teaching, moral education—which so many advocate—will become a by-product of effective undergraduate learning, thus avoiding both moral imperialism and moral abstention.

The second concern, about which Secretary Bennett has been particularly harsh and critical, is one of efficiency and cost. Unlike other countries, the United States permits large disparities in the price of higher education. The average tuition at public institutions is currently about $1,300 per year; the average at private institutions is about $5,300 per year. But actual tuitions range from almost nothing to over $12,000 per year.

With tuition, room, board, and travel expenses included, the cost of attending the public University of California, Berkeley, next fall will be $5,358; comparable costs at nearby Stanford, which is private, will be $16,835. Similarly, the cost at the public University of Illinois next fall will be $5,275; the cost at the private University of Chicago will be $17,034.

But although the price charged by such private institutions is nearly three times that charged by their public counterparts, the cost of education is roughly comparable in most of them. The key difference is that state tax dollars keep tuition relatively low in the public sector—giving all students, needy or not, a public subsidy—while in the private sector, financial aid is provided from federal, state, university and private sources, almost exclusively to those students who have financial need. Indeed, the 'high-priced' Ivy League institutions have long had a policy of admitting qualified students without considering their ability to pay, and then providing aid for those who need it. At my own university, Cornell, some 70 percent of our undergraduate students receive financial aid, including this past year $12.5 million from the university's own general purpose funds.

The related question of efficiency is complex. There is a vast difference in the resources required to operate a two-year college with a limited range of programs and services and those required to support a research university, which may teach 50 languages, subscribe to 50,000 periodicals, and operate a teaching hospital equipped to perform open heart surgery. The effectiveness of each institution cannot be measured in simple-minded economic terms, and comparisons between them border on meaningless. Yet as more than one observer has noted, "If you think education is expensive, ponder the cost of ignorance." We should be concerned about costs, and we must improve effectiveness, but the situation is unlikely to be improved by superficial criticisms and misleading comparisons.

The third complaint about our colleges and universities is that they exhibit a confusion of aims, missions, and goals. This is an area of concern to many, including Dr. Ernest Boyer. Yet it is not realistic or reasonable to impose a national uniformity of aims or attempt to replicate Harvard at more than 3,000 other colleges and universities.

A major strength of American higher education is its

endless variety. It enrolls both part-time and full-time students. It includes proprietary institutions and public ones; institutions rooted in deep religious convictions and those that are adamantly secular; institutions in idyllic rural settings and those on bustling urban streets. There are conservatories of music, schools of design, and institutes of science and technology, and their offerings range from two-year programs to those at the postdoctoral level. No other nation has such a variety of opportunities for higher education, and the benefits of that diversity have been substantial in terms of individual achievement, personal fulfillment, and national strength.

I agree that there remains a need to clarify the goals of individual institutions, to sharpen measures of performance, and to study the effectiveness of both teaching and learning in various settings. There is a particular need for more imaginative programs in life-long learning and continuing education. Confusion of local institutional aims in higher education is indeed a weakness, but diversity of aims is a tremendous strength.

There is a fourth and final complaint about the current college scene: this concerns access, choice, and admissions. I want to comment about this at some length, both because of its potentially serious economic implications and devastating social consequences and because its effective resolution will require substantial lead time.

Participation by minority groups in higher education was very limited in the years before World War II. Ninety percent of Black students, in those days, attended historically Black colleges. Hispanic students, because of their religious traditions, were concentrated chiefly in a handful of Catholic colleges. A survey carried out in 1941 by the Julius Rosenwald Fund found only two full-time tenured Black faculty members at predominately white institutions.

The GI bills that followed World War II and the Korean Conflict changed that situation by bringing large numbers of Black and Hispanic students to traditionally white cam-

puses. The civil rights movement of the late 1960s increased the numbers still further. In the years between 1960 and 1980, minority enrollment in higher education doubled from approximately 600,000 to 1.2 million. During the same period, the total enrollment on the nation's campuses increased three-fold to about 12.1 million students.

But the progress of the 1960s and 1970s has not been sustained. As was highlighted at a recent conference sponsored by the American Council on Education, not all minority groups have shared equally in the recent success of higher education. While there has been a notable and welcome increase in the numbers of Asian students on our campuses, enrollment of Black students, at the undergraduate and graduate level, has decreased. Although the number of under-represented minority youth in the 18- to 20-year-old cohort has increased since the mid-1970s and their high school graduation rates also have increased, a smaller percentage of that cohort is now attending college. The number of Blacks enrolled in higher education, for example, is lower in both absolute numbers and in percentage terms than it was only six years ago. Moreover, some 24 percent of Black college students are enrolled at historically Black colleges, and significantly more Black women than Black men are pursuing higher education.

The enrollment situation becomes worse as one moves from the undergraduate to the graduate level; the percentage of degrees awarded to minorities decreases with each successive level of education. In 1981, for example, minorities earned 11.2 percent of all bachelor's degrees; 10.5 percent of all master's, 8.3 percent of all doctorates, and 8.8 percent of all first professional degrees.

The happy exception to that downward trend is Asian students, who have increased their participation at all levels of higher education and who, in 1984, earned 43 percent of their doctorates in the physical and life sciences and 25 percent in engineering.

While the reasons for the decline in Black, Hispanic, and American Indian participation in higher education are not easy to identify, it is clear that the decline—whatever its cause—carries with it implications of great gravity.

Minorities are growing rapidly as a proportion of the population, and by the year 2020 they will account for 35 percent of all Americans. Hispanics will increase from 7.2 percent of the population to 14.7 percent, becoming our largest minority. Blacks will increase from 12.7 percent of the population to 14 percent. Asians will increase from 2.0 to 5.0 percent of the population, while American Indians will account for roughly one percent of all Americans, up from .7 percent today.

Unless these groups participate more fully in higher education, the nation will face a serious shortage of skilled labor and an expansion of the underclass that will place increasingly heavy burdens upon our welfare and social service systems. Of equally serious concern are the loss of cultural richness, the wasted human potential, and the lack of minority leadership that these trends portend.

In addition, these trends are likely to produce greater ethnic tensions, both on our campuses and in society at large, weakening our already weak position in global markets and increasingly separating us from the developing world.

How can America's colleges and universities respond to this challenge? Let me make four initial observations.

First, higher education alone cannot solve the problem, but we can contribute to the solution in significant and important ways.

Second, it is all too easy to blame the federal government for our present situation. Although the federal government has a role, and a vital role, in increasing the participation of minorities in higher education, we must not neglect our own responsibilities while awaiting government action.

Third, we cannot shift all the blame to those responsible

for the nation's elementary and secondary schools. Colleges and universities cannot await the perfect school system before addressing the problem of declining minority participation in higher education. Because their populations are growing so rapidly, Blacks and especially Hispanics will make up an increasing proportion of the overall college-age population over the next several decades. Moreover, Blacks and Hispanics are graduating from high school in increasing numbers. Colleges and universities must take advantage of these convergent trends to serve members of minority groups more effectively.

Fourth, we do not yet know all the reasons for the declining interest of minorities in higher education, although the cost of higher education, the availability of financial aid, the quality of education provided in the schools, and the support—or lack of support—provided by families are probably all involved.

It seems to me that there are five possible responses to this situation: we must increase our efforts in recruiting, improve our retention, provide adequate support services, facilitate employment and graduate and professional study, and foster wider partnerships with schools. Let me comment briefly on each of these, recognizing that no single, uniform solution is appropriate for all institutions and that solutions are much easier to prescribe in the abstract than they are to apply in practice.

• First, colleges and universities need to engage in more imaginative and effective recruiting. We must expand the pool of institutions from which we draw our students, use our own minority students to assist us in recruiting, and work with individual high schools and school systems to identify talented minority students earlier in their school careers. In partnership with schools and communities, we must develop more programs, such as summer semester programs and weekend science internships, to encourage minority students to seek higher education. And while it does no good to admit students who are not equipped to

succeed in higher education, we must look again, especially in the selective colleges and universities, at rigid admissions criteria that often treat test scores as the over-riding basis for admission.

We must also continue to press for improved federal financial aid and to be resourceful in developing financial aid from other sources, including our own general purpose budgets. One of the factors that seems to have seriously weakened the incentive for minority students to attend college has been the increasing emphasis on loans rather than grants, especially in the first two undergraduate years. At historically Black colleges, for example, Pell Grant recipients decreased 37 percent between 1979 and 1984, while the percentage of students receiving loans increased from 4 percent to 47 percent. Such a high degree of indebtedness can be a daunting burden to many of these students, whose median family income in 1984 was only $10,700 per year.

• But recruitment alone is not enough. We must ensure that the students we have worked so hard to attract to our campuses will be eager and able to succeed there. The retention rate for minority students is significantly lower than that for non-minority students. In 1980, for example, minorities accounted for 16.1 percent of undergraduate enrollments nationwide, but they earned only 11.2 percent of the degrees. In contrast, whites that year accounted for 80.6 percent of undergraduate enrollments, but they received 86.4 percent of the degrees.

Colleges and universities must establish monitoring and mentoring programs to improve retention of minority students. We need to recognize early warning signs of failure or alienation and, if necessary, allow students to extend their programs over a longer term in order to achieve success and mastery. It might also be beneficial to enter into partnerships with companies, institutions, and other agencies that would allow students to take one- or two-semester internships within the framework of a normal undergraduate experience in order to establish the connec-

tion between learning and earning.

• Increased retention will require improving the quality of our counseling, mentoring, and advising programs, and, where necessary, establishing new ones. We need to challenge all our students to value high academic standards and to strive for greater levels of personal achievement. And we need to encourage and support them in doing that.

None of these initiatives will succeed, however, unless we also create on our campuses a climate that welcomes and nurtures individuals from minority backgrounds. It is no secret that Blacks seem to do better at historically Black institutions, at least in part because the environment there is more supportive.

Unfortunately there is no single, simple way by which we can improve the climate of understanding among faculty, students, staff, and administrators on predominately white campuses. No one ethnic group can solve this problem alone. All of us must be part of the effort and part of the solution.

• The fourth area of opportunity seems to me to be that of employment. We need not only to support students who hope to find satisfying and rewarding careers immediately after graduation, but also to encourage a much larger proportion of minority students to continue their studies in graduate and professional schools.

It is a source of considerable concern, for example, that in 1984, minorities earned only 11.2 percent of all doctoral degrees awarded, and that the vast majority of the degrees were in education and the social sciences. In that year, Blacks earned only 15 of the Ph.D.s awarded in engineering, only 44 of those awarded in the physical sciences, and only three in computer science.

Academic year internships, summer research internships, faculty mentoring, links between historically Black institutions and selective graduate or professional schools, and programs that provide a bridge between undergraduate and graduate or professional studies all offer promise of increas-

ing minority students' interest and success in graduate and professional programs.

But, given the burden of debt with which many minority students graduate, we are unlikely to increase their participation in graduate/professional programs without a massive increase in minority graduate fellowships. We need to have 500 additional fellowships a year in order to extend the models already available from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health's MARC program. Only in this way can we begin to improve the dismal numbers that now confront us.

When combined with incentives, opportunities for networking, and flexibility in appointment criteria, an increased flow in the pipeline of Ph.D. and professional degree production will allow us to appoint more members of minority groups to our faculties. These faculty recruitment efforts must be accompanied by programs that nurture and support the individuals we appoint to faculty positions.

We must also increase the flow of minority faculty into administrative positions, but we must do this in ways that do not compromise their ability to obtain expertise and distinction in their chosen disciplinary and professional fields early in their careers. The American Council on Education's fellowship program is one good example of what can be done in this area.

• But none of this will succeed if we continue to tolerate abysmal schools. We are in the midst of a workplace revolution comparable in scope to the industrial revolution or the agricultural revolution. Assembly lines, which currently employ 13 percent of American workers, may employ only 5 percent by the year 2,000, just as agriculture, which once employed 75 percent of all Americans, now employs only 3 percent.

The jobs now available in the new workplace demand a higher level of skills than ever before, yet illiteracy remains a problem of major proportions. Indeed 75 percent of those who are unemployed are thought to have

basic literacy problems.

A full 23 million Americans are illiterate at the 4th grade level, and 23 million more are illiterate at the 9th grade level. Each year, an estimated 700,000 individuals graduate from high school unable to read or write at the 9th grade level. The number of functional illiterates is expected to increase by 2.3 million each year, including 1.3 million who are new immigrants.

Equally distressing, almost 30 percent of students entering our school systems do not graduate. In many inner-city high schools the drop-out rate exceeds 50 percent; in Japan the drop-out rate is a mere five percent. Contributing to these disturbing trends are the characteristics of the students themselves. Some 15 percent of American students entering school have mental or physical handicaps; 10 to 15 percent speak a first language other than English; 24 percent of them are living in poverty.

In order to address these problems, universities must develop new partnerships with schools, and in this task AED can play a vital role. I see three goals toward which we might, together, direct our efforts.

First, we can ensure that as we struggle to meet the need for a million more teachers over the next 10 years—just to keep our schools open—we do not sacrifice quality. This will require both better training programs in our colleges and universities and better opportunities for teacher recognition, career development, and professional satisfaction in the schools.

Second, we can agree upon some measurable, realistic target by which to reduce the high school drop-out rate nationwide. I suggest that cutting the drop-out rate in half—to 15 percent—might be such an attainable goal. We must then establish and fund a series of programs to achieve it.

Third, we can establish some meaningful competency level of literacy for those we graduate from the schools. I know that standardized testing is controversial, but unless a high school diploma certifies some minimal level of literacy,

it certifies very little. In devising some meaningful level of competency and in ensuring that it is fair and equitable, schools, colleges, and AED can all play valuable roles.

I realize, of course, that increasing the participation of minority groups in higher education will not be easy. Even our most creative and thoughtful efforts are unlikely to produce immediate results. Neglecting the present situation, however, carries with it consequences that will be far more divisive and far more difficult to resolve.

I do not believe that these three vital goals can be achieved solely by adopting state and federal programs. But I am persuaded that we cannot succeed without state and federal support and vigorous federal leadership. I hope that AED may act as an advocate and catalyst in this vital area. For unless we honor our national commitment to make higher education attainable by all who can benefit from it, we face the possibility of a nation divided in fundamental ways—by race, ethnic group, educational background, economic achievement, and social commitment. A nation so divided will be unable to serve the great ideals that brought it into existence and unable to realize its hopes for the future.

That is why, among all the challenges facing higher education in the closing years of this century, the participation of minorities may well be the most urgent that we face. It is also an area in which AED has unique qualifications and unique opportunities for leadership.

A quarter-century ago John W. Gardner wrote, "A nation is never finished. You can't build it and then leave it standing as the pharaohs did the pyramids. It has to be re-created for each generation by believing, caring men and women. It is now our turn. If we don't care, nothing can save the nation. If we believe and care, nothing can stop us." In that great venture, we are all partners.

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